Making Fire

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372 The natives of the Kasai-Fimi-Lukenie region make fire i
three different ways.

The Bateke and Banfumungu of the river use flint and steel
the Banfumungu of the interior, the Boboma, Mosengere, Tumb

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[5K]

Fig. 59.
Making Fire by Friction.

Fig. 60.
Making Fire by Rotation.

Wadia, Basakata, Bobale, Balesa, Ipanga, Batitu, Bokala, and
some of the Yaelima use the friction method [102] or longitud
nal rubbing; and the Yaelima of the east, the Basongo-Meno,
the Bankutshu of the Bena-Dibele-Kole region obtain fire by
gyration or rotary rubbing.

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[17] The native method tends to disappear rapidly everywhere
with the introduction of matches, although most of the natives
have kept their primitive strike-a-light and always carry it wit
them on journeys. If there are no matches or if through some
circumstance -- the humidity, the crossing of a river or marsh
the matches will not work, the native takes out his strike-a-lig
and makes fire by the native method.

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372 The strike-a-light of the Bateke and Banfumungu of the
river consists of an iron or steel blade from three to eight centi
meters long and two to three centimeters wide, a flint (a mere

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372 chip of gneiss or silex, a gunflint or quartz fragment), and tinder. Any dry and highly inflammable matter, such as dry leaves, etc., may serve as tinder, but tufts of the vegetable fiber that the natives gather from the trunks of palm or banana trees are commonly used. [103]

To make fire, the Bateke and Banfumungu of the river prepare a small bundle of dry twigs in the midst of which they set a pinch of tinder. A few strokes of the strike-a-light produce a spark, and the fire is started. A small, incandescent dot, barely visible, a trifle suffices. The native immediately blows very lightly on the tinder, fans the fire, slightly stirs the twigs, and soon the flame leaps up.

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● 372 To make fire by friction or the longitudinal rubbing method, the native uses two pieces of wood, one broad, flat, and soft, the other long, more or less evenly cylindrical, and very hard.

During my journey to the interior of the Kasai-Fimi-Lukenie region, I had an opportunity to observe firsthand this method of making fire, notably at Bomu among the Banfumungu, at Mpa among the Mosengere, at Kempa among the Basakata, at Lubamiri among the Wadia, at Wambia among the Batiru, at Wumbuli among the Bokala, and, finally, at Loport among the Tselima.

The native proceeds in the same fashion everywhere.

When he is alone, he sets the piece of soft wood, which has a groove parallel to its axis, flat on the ground. He kneels and pins the wood under one of his knees. Holding the rod of hard wood in both hands, he vigorously rubs the point along the groove with a continual back-and-forth movement. In no time at all fine, charred wood dust accumulates at one end of the groove. In less than a minute one sees a spot ignited. The native took care to prepare the tinder in advance. He puts the little incandescent nucleus on it, blows, and the flame soon leaps up.

When there are several natives, as is usually the case, one man puts his foot on the grooved piece, while a second man kneels and rubs the end of the small rod in the groove, as though to carve it deeper.

In the gyration or rotary rubbing method used by the peoples of the Bena Dibele-Kole region and among part of the eastern

372 Yaelima, the apparatus consists of two small cylindrical rods. [104] One of the rods, cut from relatively soft wood, has one or more notches. The other, rounded at one end, is of hard wood. The notched rod is placed over the tinder; the other one is held perpendicularly, with the round end inserted in the notch. The native gives the latter rod a rapid rotary motion by spinning it between his hands. At the same time he slides his hands from top to bottom in order to increase the pressure as much as possible.

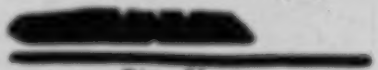

Fig. 61
Rod and Small Board with Notches.

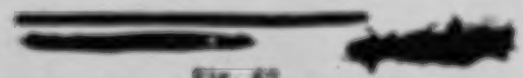

Fig. 62
Two rods, One with Notches.

The special skill consists in producing this motion with as few pauses as possible. This is why several natives usually participate. One holds the notched rod in place, a second one spins the other rod, while a third stands by ready to maintain the gyrating motion as soon as his companion reaches the bottom of the rod. The first spinner will relieve the other in turn. After several rotations, a small incandescent spot appears in the charred wood dust in the notch, and a spark falls on the tinder, which catches fire.

The areas in which these three methods of making fire are found form three distinct ethnic zones in the region visited.

The first one includes only the Benzie and part of the Banfumungu and is characterized by use of the iron blade and flint.

The second one with the system of friction or longitudinal rubbing extends from the interior of Banfumungu territory to the center of the region occupied by the Yaelima. [105]

372 117 The third, with the system of gyration or rotary rubbing, includes the easternmost part of Yaelima territory and the whole Bena Dibele-Kole region.

372 177 This last method has also been noted among the Balesa, and we were able to verify that some of the natives in the region were familiar with it and used it. It is not indigenous to this tribe, however, and must have been introduced into the region by soldiers or laborers from the old Tolo post, who came from regions where this method was known.

It is also possible that the eastern Yaelima borrowed this method from the peoples of the south, although we were unable to obtain any precise information on this point. This hypothesis, however, is justified by the fact that we found the friction and gyration methods in certain Yaelima villages, and the natives preferred to use the latter method in every such instance. It must be noted that the gyration method is not only less tiring but also faster and permits the natives to take turns. It provides a maximum of yield for a minimum of work. There is, therefore, nothing astonishing in the fact that wherever the natives have had an opportunity to observe the advantages of this method, they have made a point of adopting it.

372 In our opinion, the friction or longitudinal rubbing method should be regarded as having been used exclusively in former times by all the tribes, from the Banfumungu to the Yaelima. This method may still be found among the tribes of the Dekese region, but, unfortunately, we were unable to substantiate this.

All these peoples in this respect would belong to the same ethnic group, which is clearly differentiated from the group of tribes in the Bena Dibele-Kole region.

Salt

258 The preparation of salt occupies an important place in the life of certain tribes of the Kasai-Lukenie region. Lacking both salt mines and salt water in their territory, the natives proceeded to obtain this precious condiment, indispensable to the diet, by extracting it from plants. [106]

Wherever the introduction of imported products has not eliminated the native method, the extraction of salt is a veritable national industry. The whole community participates in it.

[177] Among the Batoke, Banfumungu, Baloma, and part of the Wadia, the introduction of salt has completely eliminated the use and preparation of native salt.